

VZCZCXRO3821
PP RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHH
DE RUEHHM #0459 1231004
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 021004Z MAY 08
FM AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4443
INFO RUEHHI/AMEMBASSY HANOI PRIORITY 3047
RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 0047
RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY 4667

UNCLAS HO CHI MINH CITY 000459

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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STATE FOR EAP/MLS AND DRL/AWH

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CM](#) [VM](#)
SUBJECT: HCMC OLYMPIC TORCH RELAY GOES FORWARD AS PLANNED

REF: A) HANOI 503 AND PREVIOUS B) HCMC 443 C) HANOI 0184

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Despite heavy traffic snarls and reports of potential protests, the Olympic torch relay wound through HCMC on the advertised route without diversion on April 29. According to observers, the police presence was notable but not as heavy as at other international locations. Youth activists failed to show up for a planned protest in front of the HCMC Opera House. A few land rights protesters and members of blogger Dieu Cay's "Freelance Journalists Club" reported being detained by police but were released after the torch relay was over. In Hanoi, a handful of activists who attempted to stage demonstrations downtown were detained on April 29, including Bloc 8406 activist and writer Nguyen Xuan Nghia, who was released on May 2. A planned demonstration in front of the Chinese Embassy never materialized amidst tight security. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) The Beijing Olympic torch relay moved through HCMC on April 29 as scheduled, using the same route previously publicized in local press reports. The procession began at the Opera House in the heart of HCMC and wound its way through downtown districts to a sports stadium near the airport for the closing ceremony. Among senior GVN leaders attending were Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Thien Nhan, HCMC People's Committee Chairman Le Hoang Quan and Deputy Foreign Minister Vu Dung. The deputy of the Beijing Olympics Organizing Board, Li Binghua, and the Chinese Ambassador to Vietnam, Hu Qiangwen, also attended. Eyewitnesses said traffic became snarled after police blocked off intersections along the relay route twenty minutes before the ceremony, resulting in thirty minute to one-hour delays for HCMC commuters in some gridlocked districts.

¶3. (SBU) While police were clearly present on city streets and near the start and end points for the relay ceremony, security was not as heavy as it appeared to be in other international locations that featured groups of guards flanking the torch all along the route. Official press reports and local observers cited 'hundreds' to 'thousands' of cheering well-wishers lining the relay route and filling the stadium to watch the closing ceremony.

Would-Be Demonstrators Detained Briefly

¶4. (SBU) Some Democratic Party of Vietnam (DPV) activists tried to get groups of students and land protesters to stage a demonstration in front of the Opera House, but the students did not show up. Three land protesters were detained by police two hours before the ceremony began, but were released after the relay ended. Four members of blogger Dieu Cay's Freelance Journalists Club were detained on April 28 and released at midnight on April 29 (Ref B). Dieu Cay remains in custody on charges of tax evasion, and a lawyer named Le Tran Luat has now

offered to represent him pro bono in any subsequent trial. DPV leader Tran Khue said he received a police summons on April 28, but did not go to the police station and did not venture out during the torch relay ceremony. Dissident Dr. Nguyen Dan Que said he also stayed at home, but noted several extra plainclothes policemen posted outside his residence that day, as did UBCV monk Thich Khong Thanh.

15. (SBU) In Hanoi, there were reports of a handful of demonstrators being detained on April 29, including writer and Bloc 8406 activist Nguyen Xuan Nghia. Nghia has reported regular surveillance and harassment from police, and was prevented from attending the funeral of Hoang Minh Chinh in February (Ref C). Nghia was reportedly released on May 2. A planned demonstration in front of the Chinese Embassy never materialized, most likely because of heavy security posted there. Both posts are still in the process of confirming detentions and releases, but most detentions appear to be temporary.

16. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassy Hanoi.

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